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Cooking

Izakaya: The Japanese Pub Cookbook
Mark Robinson
Kodansha International
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Tokyo's extremely sophisticated food scene encompasses a similar breadth of inexpensive to mid-range dining options highlighted by the *izakaya*, or Japanese "pub." Like its British counterpart, the izakaya is an important social gathering place in addition to a drinking hole and modestly priced dining spot. At best, the food is gloriously innovative.

In fact, only a small number of Japanese regularly dine in *kaiseki* haute cuisine restaurants. And Japanese chefs do not all spend years refining their knife skills along a predestined culinary path shrouded in ritual and hierarchy. Indeed, Japanese food can be fun, even whimsical, and diners gravitate to izakayas to loosen up. In his introduction to *Izakaya: The Japanese Pub Cookbook*, Mark Robinson writes, "as the evening progresses and energy levels rise, you will hear straight talk and the uttering of hard truths that won't ordinarily be spoken. In short, at the izakaya, people are more themselves."

Kodansha is promoting this very fine project as the first English publication to thoroughly examine the izakaya. Herein, we are invited into eight popular Tokyo pubs to learn about izakaya food culture, profiles of Japanese ingredients, the often fascinating backgrounds of chefs and owners, and sixty recipes that Robinson calls "delicious and reassuring: recipes that don't appear elsewhere, and allow you to recreate a Japanese pub meal at home, whether for a party or a simple dinner."

Izakaya food is small plate cooking, similar to Spanish tapas. None of the recipes are overly complicated. Dishes like "Sauteed Small Squid," or "Celery and Skewered Pork Cutlets" stand next to "Mashed Potato Salad with Mayonnaise" and simple cubes of raw sashimi grade tuna with chopped scallions and stalks of asparagus in a miso-mustard dressing. Home cooks of all leanings and persuasions will find *The Japanese Pub Cookbook* an excellent source for appetizer and party food ideas.